



## Private investigations

By Tokyo Families | ASK THE EXPERT



### What problem areas do most patients see you about?

When I meet with clients for the first time, part of my role is to act as a detective, to look beyond the current distress to see if there is an underlying cause. The distress often has a mood disorder like depression or an anxiety disorder at its roots. It is also common for me to consult with people who are having some type of relationship issue, be it with a partner, spouse, other family member, or co-worker. Other serious mental health issues such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia present less frequently, but are part of what makes the detective work so interesting. On the coaching side it is most common for me to advise people to be more effective as managers and get the most from their organization, or to help set goals when they feel that their life has stalled and needs some change.

### Tell us the warning signs of stress, depression, panic, eating, personality disorders?

While stress is an outside factor that impinges on one's ability to cope, depression, panic, eating, and personality disorders are conditions that may be caused by a mix of neurophysiology and/or character development problems. Some of the signs of these conditions are quite subtle, while others are easier to spot. Changes in appetite, a recent increase or decrease in weight, difficulties initiating or maintaining sleep, early morning awakening, sleeping excessively, a change of interest in sex, and a loss of energy could be considered physical warning signs of depression, one type of mood disorder, which is the most common problem. Other signs that may also indicate a mood disorder such as mild depression, atypical depression, or manic depression, are irritability, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, difficulties in concentrating, losing interest in other people, difficulties making decisions, excessive alcohol use, racing thoughts, feelings of sadness, crying more than usual or thoughts of hurting oneself. If these signs are not given appropriate attention, people may suffer socially, romantically, financially, academically, or professionally, with mild to severe consequences.

### Why should people seek professional counseling in these areas?

I consider myself to be an advocate for my clients, working together collaboratively on their issues. Having a third party can help clients to identify goals and potential solutions to the problems which are causing emotional turmoil. By seeking counseling, clients may learn to examine the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that cause difficulties in their life, and learn effective ways to deal with these difficulties by building on personal strengths. Through counseling a client may learn how to improve communications and coping skills, strengthen their

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self-esteem, or promote behavioral changes for optimal mental health.

**There has been a sharp rise in the number of international marriages in Japan in recent years. How in your own perspective should mixed couples rise above the challenge posed by cultural and lifestyle differences?**

I believe that the key for healthy international marriages is no different from other relationships in that it all boils down to having effective communication skills and a willingness to compromise. When doing relationship counseling, I spend the majority of time teaching people how to communicate with each other. Once people master these skills, they often find that they are able to understand the real issues rather than the perceived issues with their partners. These issues often come from differences in emotional needs. After discussing the issues in a constructive manner, it is often the case that the solutions to problems are not as difficult or impossible as initially thought.

**Tell us more about what it is you do as Associate Center Director for the Meguro Counseling Center.**

As the Associate Center Director I work together with Dr. Berger to provide counseling services in English for the international community, in addition to services in the Japanese language for local residents. Some of the more common problems that we have experience treating include self-confidence problems, relationship/family problems, depression and manic depression, anxiety/panic, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, substance and alcohol abuse, history of traumatic experiences PTSD/child abuse, feelings of unreality, sleep disturbances, psychosomatic (mind/body) disorders, women's issues, gay and lesbian issues, and child and adolescent disturbances.

**How is life-coaching viewed in Japan?**

Life coaching, like counseling and therapy, has not yet gained the acceptance in Japan as it has in other countries. I believe this is partly cultural in that people are less likely to do something that will make them appear different from their peers, for example, to change employers or have a career change.

**What in your own words is the recipe for a successful family life?**

My recipe for a successful family life is based on the idea of sharing and teamwork. Not as individuals but rather together, facing the difficulties that come along and celebrating the achievements. When the pain is shared it is diminished. When joys are shared they increase.

*Douglas Eames, Ph.D. provides counseling services through the Meguro Counseling Center. [www.megurocounseling.com](http://www.megurocounseling.com) 03-3716-6624. For coaching services please visit [www.japantherapist.com](http://www.japantherapist.com) or call directly at 090-5059-8333.*

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The logo for Tokyo Families features the word "TOKYO" in a small, spaced-out font above the word "families" in a larger, lowercase, sans-serif font. To the right of "families" is the website address "tokyofamilies.com" in a smaller font.